

For those at increased risk of food-borne illness *

Don't Let Your Food Make You Sick!

- ♦ **Helpful tools to keep food safe:** meat and refrigerator thermometers, insulated shopping/cooler bags, cooler packs (to keep portable food cold); disposable cutting sheets and paper towels.
- ♦ **Fruits & Vegetables** - Contrary to common belief, those with impaired immune systems do not need to avoid *all* raw fruits and vegetables. It is important, though, to make sure that all the food you eat is as clean as possible.
 - Wash produce right before eating it. It will spoil faster if you wash it before storing.
 - Rinse and rub all surfaces clean under running water. (Do not use soap on food).
 - Scrub firm produce surfaces (such as melon rinds) with vegetable brushes before cutting.
 - Reject any food with mold on it (cutting out a moldy spot is not good enough).
 - If you can't wash it well (as with raspberries) -- **don't eat it!**
 - **Pre-washed, pre-packaged salad used fresh from the bag should be safe** if the product has been well refrigerated, no "off" odor is detected, and the product is used well before the "use by" date.
 - Reject any food that has an "off" odor or bruised, wilted or discolored surfaces.
 - Do not drink "raw", unpasteurized juices.
 - Do not eat raw bean/seed sprouts. The seeds are often contaminated, so rinsing isn't enough.



- ♦ **Meat/Fish/Poultry** Don't eat raw or undercooked fish, shellfish, meat, or poultry-- even in small amounts. This includes foods like cold smoked fish/lox, raw fish sushi and rare meat. Order well-done meat (with no pink showing).

Although the risk of getting sick from luncheon meats is low, the CDC* recommends that those at increased risk reheat these foods until steaming hot (and then let cool) before consuming them.
- ♦ **Eggs** Cook all eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Avoid eggs "over easy" and any food which contains raw eggs (- home-made ice creams, raw cookie dough or home-made Caesar salad dressing).

Low cholesterol egg products like *Eggbeaters®* or *Simply Whites®* may be used raw (i.e. for Eggnog), since they are pasteurized.
- ♦ **Milk** -All milk, yogurt, cheese or milk-based food must be pasteurized – not "raw".
- ♦ **Cheese** –Do not eat cheeses with foods like chili peppers added to them, or unpasteurized, ripened soft cheeses such as Brie, Mexican soft cheese (Queso blanco fresco), Feta or blue cheese. These cheeses often have unacceptable levels of bacteria in them. (Baking these risky cheeses to 140 ° kills most harmful bacteria, making them safe to eat). You can eat commercially packaged, refrigerated cheeses such as American, Mozzarella, Jack, Swiss, mild and medium cheddar and pasteurized cheese spreads.



Miscellaneous Food Items:

- Avoid raw or unpasteurized honey (it may contain harmful soil bacteria related to botulism).
- Don't use bulk leaf herbs and teas which may contain non-food contaminants (dirt, insects).
- Avoid "home style" cheese dressings which are not shelf-stable (require refrigeration).
- Do not eat uncooked tofu, miso, tempeh, or raw brewer's yeast. Bring miso to a boil. Boil tofu for 5 minutes.

* CDC = The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

* Those at increased risk of food-borne illness include: patients receiving chemotherapy or immuno-suppressant drugs; those with impaired immunity (such as HIV/AIDS), the elderly, infants, and pregnant women.

- **Place raw meat**, fish or poultry into separate plastic bags before placing them in your cart.
- **Select frozen foods and meats last**, just before checking out. Use insulated cooler bags or cool packs.
- Especially in hot weather, **use coolers**, etc. to keep food cold on the way home.



Preparing Food

- If there is any question about the safety of your well water, have it tested.
- **Keep everything that touches food clean.** Wash your hands well before and after handling each food. Use soap and rub hands vigorously for 20 seconds under running, warm water. Use hot, soapy water throughout meal preparation - to wash dishes, cooking utensils, knives, cutting boards and counters. Dishrags and sponges can harbor dangerous bacteria. Use clean paper towels and sanitizing cleansers to wipe down surfaces.

Storing Food

- Keep uncooked meats, fish, poultry and their juices away from other foods.
- Use a refrigerator thermometer to ensure that the freezer is at 0°F or below, the refrigerator 35°F- 40°F.
- Never leave perishable foods out of the refrigerator for over 2 hours.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers immediately, well-covered. Use refrigerated leftovers within 2 to 3 days.
- Use fresh fish, poultry, and ground meat within 1 to 2 days of purchase.
- Use other meats (larger, un-sliced, un-ground cuts, such as roasts) within 3 days.
Freeze them if you won't be cooking them within these time frames.
- Pay close attention to "use by" dates.



Thawing

- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator, or in cold water that is changed every 30 minutes, or in a microwave oven set to defrost. Cook them right after thawing.
- **Never thaw foods at room temperature!**
- Do not refreeze thawed foods (unless they have been cooked). Freezing creates icicles in the food, breaking down cell walls, which makes the food more vulnerable to contamination.



Cooking Food

- Cook meats, fish and poultry to the well-done stage (160°F usually protects against illness).
- Meat juices should run clear when the meat is pierced. Left-over foods or ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs should be thoroughly reheated (no cold spots) - until steaming.

Eating Out?

You are safest preparing your own food, and not eating out when your white blood cell "counts" are low. Eating at the homes of friends is actually a common cause of food-borne-illness. (Educate others about your need for carefully prepared foods before accepting social engagements where food will be served). Food served piping hot is the safest. While restaurants should follow appropriate food preparation guidelines, illness has been traced to improperly handled soft-serve ice creams, luncheon meats, salads, improperly washed fruits and vegetables and undercooked meats.

Some web sites for up-dates on food borne-illness include:

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/foodborn.html>

<http://www.fightbac.org/main.cfm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety>

Questions? Your medical team can contact the dietitian assigned to you, or call the number below.

NIH Clinical Center, Nutrition Department, Bethesda, MD 800-849-7048

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